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Chapter 1 by Fanwizard

Living in the dull little city of Pearland, Texas, I didn't expect my life to ever get even a teeny bit exciting. The population of the city barely reached a hundred thousand, proving how exciting the city is.

It's always scorching hot, even in the coldest winter, and not to mention deadly boring that anyone who moved into the area could take one look and move back to whatever exciting life they used to have. (Okay, so maybe I like the warmth, but I love snow. Snow cancels school! And school is definitely not good.)

I had a normal life once, with a pesky (irritating, troublesome, obnoxious) younger sister named Ellie, an ordinary Yorkie named Star, and ordinary parents.

We used to live in Manhattan, where all of those famous celebrities lived and you could catch a glimpse of them if you were really lucky. Instead of owning an apartment in New York, we own a huge ranch here. I didn't even mind sharing a room with my infuriating and sloppy sister in Manhattan. At least life was exciting then. I went to a normal school, with normal friends, and normal teachers who taught the normal lessons.

This is the story of how I turned this boring life on a ranch I never wanted into a different world completely with the help of a complete stranger who helped me realize life is a wonderful yet

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"Five more minutes!" I groaned as I shoved my head under my pillow, trying to block out Ellie's annoying chant. "God, what time is it even?"

"Six! Six!" Ellie chanted, as she snatched my pillow away from me. Then, she grabbed my blanket, and started yanking it off my bed.

"Mean!" I yelled as I tried to ignore the chanting, jabbing my hand in the general direction of the chanting.

"Owww," Ellie whined as she stopped yanking for a second, rubbing her stomach where I jabbed her. "GET UP!"

"Who needs an alarm clock when you got a little sister?" I muttered as I swung my legs over the edge of my bed, feeling the fuzziness of my lavender polka rug under my feet. I glanced at my alarm clock on my nightstand, and it indeed was only 6:02.

"Yay!" Ellie bounced up and down, making the bed bounce along with her. "I did it! I got her up!" With that, she sprung off my bed, fell on her face, scrambled to stand up, slid the door open, ran out, and hopped down the stairs, her loud feet creating a loud thump. I pulled out my diamond blue skirt and chevron ocean blue tee, as the sun slowly rose. As I pulled out a towel, I heard a pair of footsteps climb up the stairs.

"Well you're up bright and early," Mom said, smiling at me from the doorway, her eyes twinkling. "I expected you to still be sleeping."

"A certain vexatious little sister woke me up by yanking my blanket off my bed," I explained as I heard the clicking of heels on the stairs. "Why did I even ask for a sister?"

Star bounded into my room, leaping onto my bed gracefully, curling up as she tried to keep the warmth in my bed.

"The bus comes in an hour," Mom reminded me as she turned to exit my bedroom. "Breakfast is ready. Oh, and be sure to make your bed."

"I have to take a shower first," I responded as I headed for the bathroom, and shut the door, locking it so a certain sister couldn't annoy me further.

After I was done, I dressed myself in my school clothes, and headed downstairs to eat breakfast. As soon as I went down the stairs, I smelled bacon and coffee. I've always loved the smell of coffee but don't plan on drinking any for years. My parents tell me coffee shrinks me, yet Dad

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of the fridge, and poured a glass of orange juice. As I was opening the Smucker's jar, Mom started talking.

"So," Mom said cheerfully as she placed the orange juice carton back in the fridge. "Are you excited for school?"

"I am!" Ellie piped up. I scooted my chair a little further from the sloppy mess of a five year old. I seriously didn't want to be near her during meals.

"Ellie, don't stab your bacon like that. Smaller bites!" Mom scolded as she placed my glass of orange juice in front of me before hurrying over to Ellie almost immediately.

Ellie had been stabbing her bacon viciously with her fork, and trying to eat all of them at the same time. I scooted my chair another an inch away from Ellie again. Mom leaned over and cut Ellie's bacon, eggs, and pancakes into smaller pieces. She doesn't trust Ellie with a butter knife, even if Ellie is entering Kindergarten.

Dad walked over, carrying the plate of bacon like it was a piece of gold. "Anymore bacon?" "No thanks Stuart," Mom said as she walked over and placed Dad's daily mug of coffee and his phone.

Dad turned on his phone as he began to sip from his hot coffee mug. He's a big Garfield fan, just like Ellie and me. It runs in the family.

After I was done, I placed my glass and plate in the sink, and headed to the mudroom to put on my shoes.

At last, I went back to my room to brush my teeth, made my bed, put on my heavy galaxy print backpack loaded down with brand new school supplies, shoved my lunchbag into my backpack, and hugged Mom and Dad good bye who hadn't moved an inch since going upstairs. I just waved at Ellie, not trusting her not to spill apple juice on my clothes. I wasn't in the mood to change clothes today. Any day but today.

"Have fun sweetie!" Mom called as I opened the front door, preparing to say goodbye to summer and my comfortable home and hello to school. "Make new friends!"

"I'm not making any promises," I breathed as I stepped out and shut the door firmly behind me. As I descended down the stairs, I breathed in the fresh air. In Manhattan, the mornings were filled with honking cars, construction vehicles, and loud shouts that could be heard all the way

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"Bye Arabella!" I called toward my favorite horse, a brown and white one currently paying no attention to me as Arabella nibbled on the grass. I didn't care. Arabella usually doesn't pay much attention to anything in the mornings.

I began running on the grass, my backpack bouncing up and down on my back. I still had a lot of ground to cover to reach the bus stop. I definitely didn't want to miss the bus on the first day of school. It's embarrassing to be driven to school by your parents, especially when you ride the bus typically.

I climbed over the fence, landing on the ground hard, but thankfully still on my feet. I kept running, hearing my feet tear across the grass and tear out a few blades every few inches. Only a few feet away now, I finally reached the bus stop, and stood, waiting patiently for the bus to arrive.

When a whole five minutes had passed and the bus still hadn't arrived, I pulled out my awesome cell phone Mom had given me for my birthday over the summer.

My mom believed that every teenager entering middle school should get a cell phone and that I was mature enough to have one. I totally am. (NOT!) Mom had let me choose which model I wanted, but had given me a few conditions.

It had to have a GPS tracking device in case I went missing so Mom could check where I was.

It had to be waterproof and shatterproof so I couldn't break it easily.

I had to pay for the replacement insurance with my own allowance in case I lost it.

It had to have a prepaid plan so I couldn't run up an enormous bill.

I couldn't text at the dinner table or take funny pictures of my family and post them on the internet.

I had to be able to talk on it.

It couldn't interfere with school.

I couldn't stay up and text Angeline on a weekday.

I couldn't play games or text during school.

No texting or talking to strangers.

The phone had to be internet capable.

Mom believed I was mature enough to have an unlimited texting and calling minutes, as long as I

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kids, and headed off to be the "average" kid. I don't exactly blend into the background, but I don't stand out.

"Mornin," the bus driver, Jacob said as I stepped up on the bus stairs, saying bye to my freedom and hello to school and the jocks, cheerleaders, and everyone else.

"Ranch girl," a boy whispered to me as I headed past him, as the girl beside him giggled. "Do you need some salad?"

I made sure I sat in a seat far away from the eighth graders, yet still away from that boy and his giggling friend.

Slumping down into my seat, I turned on my phone and sent Mom a text using only one hand. On bus now.

Mom sent a text a minute later.

Have fun at school and make sure u text me when u get on the bus in the afternoon.

For the rest of the bus ride, I just sent texts back and forth to Angeline, asking if she was nervous, what classes she had, etc.

When we were in elementary school, Angeline went home with me everyday on the bus, so we could ride horses, and paint together. Mom would drive Angeline home at around 6, and we would promise to see each other tomorrow at school.

Now that we were in middle school, Angeline's mom had signed Angeline up for ballet classes, and having play dates together were out of the question.

At around the seventh stop after mine, I realized, the bus was parked, yet we weren't at school yet. Huh?

I sat up straighter, my eyes searching for what was happening. Jacob wasn't in the bus driver's seat, but instead, outside helping someone hunched over on the bus.

Now why would someone need help getting onto the bus? I stared a little more. Then, it hits me hard. There's someone in a wheelchair riding my bus.

Apparently, no one else realizes it, or don't bother to stop talking to their friend or texting.

As I examine the person who's in the wheelchair, I notice that this person has thick, straight brown hair done in an angled bob that caught the pale morning light. She's slumping, like she's embarrassed to have to be helped. She's wearing a Patriots' iersey which I can completely

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I look around, trying to figure out who she's talking to. Then it hits me. (I'm such an idiot sometimes.) She's talking to me. The girl is staring right at me.

- "Hi," I say back. As soon as I say it, I want to slap myself. She already said hi. I'm not a parrot.
- "What's your name?" the girl asks. She has this really soft voice, gentle and calming. "My name's Katherine Thomas."
- "Amelia. Amelia Allen," I said, giving Katherine a smile. "What grade are you entering this year?"
- "Sixth," Katherine said, giving me a faint smile as she ran her slender fingers through the sides of her short hair. "You?"
- "Same," I answered as I fiddled with the special ring with my pearl birthstone Mom had given to me for my tenth birthday.
- "My family just moved to the area," Katherine explained. "We're still getting used to the weather. We used to live in Minnesota."
- "I moved two years ago from Manhattan," I said. "In Pearland, not much exciting happens. Besides vehicles getting egged every six months by some random teenagers and the Pearland Little League."
- "What was it like there?" Katherine asked, her eyes wide with amazement. "In Manhattan, I mean."
- "Awesome, though it wasn't exactly what you called roomy," I remembered the apartment, small yet cozy. "How was Minnesota?"
- "Minnesota wasn't quite what you called exciting," Katherine laughed. "In Minnesota, the most exciting thing was the weather."
- Just then, my phone buzzed with a text. I unzipped my backpack and removed it, and checked who it was. Angeline.
- Where R U Earhart? (Since my first name is Amelia, Angeline calls me Earhart after Amelia Earhart.) School's already started!
- I glanced at the time on my phone. 8:20. Holy smokes! School already started and the bus wasn't even moving!
- The bus isn't moving. IDK why! I will text u l8er when the bus starts moving again.
- "Sorry," I said, remembering Katherine was watching me, placing my phone back in my backpack,

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"The bus broke down," the girl beside the boy who called me Ranch Girl said. The boy nodded, and told the pair in front of him, then the pair behind of him.

In less than ten minutes, the everyone knew that the bus broke down. No one needed any proof. We just knew. It was the way the rule that only the cool and popular kids could sit in the back of the bus.

Jacob got back on the bus, and used his cell phone to call for help. Every person on the bus whipped out their cell phones, trying to get a signal and contact their friends.

A, the bus broke down, but I'm fine. Waiting 4 help 2 arrive. Will text u 18er.

Mom, the bus broke down, but I'm fine. Will contact u when I get to school.

One boy in the back (who I guessed was an eighth grader) tried using his phone to call his friends, but there was no signal.

Time crept by slowly. I glanced at my lilac watch. 8:34. The bus was strangely quiet as if the world was afraid to make a single noise.

"Uh," Katherine said softly, then cleared her throat. "What homeroom teacher do you have this year?"

"Wait a minute," I opened the side pocket to my backpack and removed my classes paper that had been mailed to me only two weeks ago.

"Ms. Philips," I read from the paper. "Room 409. Ms. Phillips is the new writing in sixth grade. Who do you have?"

"Mrs. Johnson," Katherine said. "She's the math teacher. People say she has a jar full of candy on her desk to give to the students who make an hundred on a quiz."

"I heard Ms. Phillips is the nicest teacher; she never gives any homework and is a Patriots fan." I smiled at the thought of a middle aged woman cheering for the Patriots. I kept fiddling with the pearl ring, because my hands liked to be in motion and I could hardly ever sit still.

"I'm so hungry," a girl that looked around thirteen complained. "Isn't there anything to eat on this bus?"

"Didn't you eat breakfast?" the girl sitting beside of the girl with the dyed black and pink hair asked.

The girl with the dyed black and pink hair shook her head. "I was in a hurry. Overslept this

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Kisses, and a Snicker's bar!" The boy took out the Snicker's bar, and unwrapped it, munching happily on the delicious chocolate.

"Could I have the pretzels please?" the girl with the dyed hair pleaded. "I'm starving. I won't make it till eleven on an empty stomach."

The boy tossed her a bag of pretzels, and she greedily opened it, devouring it less than two minutes.

"Thanks," the girl with the dyed hair said as she hurriedly walked to the front of the bus and threw the empty bag away.

"Odd school," Katherine said, as she traced the black rose on her phone case with her pointer finger.

I stared down at my own phone case. It was covered with pearls of all sizes, and I loved it. Mom had given it to me for my birthday. I actually had a whole collection of phone cases, (Don't judge) covered with flowers, butterflies, jewels, birds, plants, and even the Eiffel Tower. I had even decorated one with all of my bright colored Sharpies.

"It's not usually like that," I assured her as I ran my finger over the pearls. "Normally, it's pretty ordinary, and boring."

After what felt like a million years, (fifteen minutes) Katherine and I kept talking in small spurts, trying to pass the time.

Me (still fiddling with my phone case): Sooooooo. I'm BORED. Do you have any siblings? Katherine: An older brother named Ken in college who I never get to see anymore. I don't mind that though. You?

Me: Unfortunately, I have an annoying, irritating little sister that I pretend I'm not related to her in anyway.

Katherine: Do you have any pets? I have a kitten named Sweet Pie. I got her on my twelfth birthday.

Me: I have an adorable Yorkie named Star. What's your favorite color? Mine is ocean blue. Katherine: Mint green. What are your hobbies? I like to read and make anything artsy with my hands.

Me: I love horseback riding, playing the violin, listening to music, basketball, and painting.

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Katherine: I like Insurgent the best out of all the books I've read. How long have you been living in Pearland?

Me: Approximately two years since I moved from exciting Manhattan. Two years since my life became boring. How 'bout you?

Katherine: One and a half months. We're still busy trying to unpack and sort out everything. I still have at least three packed boxes in my room. My room's been a mess.

Me: What type of music do you like the best? I love pop. My mom and dad both love pop. It runs in the family.

Katherine: Pop. Always love using my phone to listen to music for hours. And doing homework. Me: What's your favorite song to listen to? I love "Counting Stars." I listen to it at least fifteen times each day.

Katherine: "Boom Clap" is my ultimate favorite song. It's awesome. I've listened to it at least a thousand times.

Me: When will this bus start moving again? We've been stuck in this bus so long. I AM BORED. Katherine: When someone rescues us. Whenever that is. Life is so boring at this second. I wish it would just speed up.

It took forever. I eventually turned on my phone to the radio station, took out my ocean blue headphones, and tried listening to the radio to ease my boredom.

Katherine took out Insurgent, and began reading, but I could tell she was becoming restless, the way she fidgeted in the wheelchair and gritted her teeth.

Jacob took out his phone again, trying to contact the school. No such luck. There was no signal.

He even tried texting the school, but I doubt the principal checked her phone every second.

The bus was silent. I guess no one knew what to do. I checked my watch again. 9:00. It had only been forty minutes since the bus broke down. My phone buzzed, alerting me to a text. I checked it. It was from Angeline.

Where R U now A? R U @ school yet? It's already past 9! U've missed most of 1st period! Pausing to glance at Katherine, I quickly used only my thumbs to give her a text, bending over my phone to make sure I used all the shortcuts I learned.

Still in bus. Bus is broken down. Tried contacting 4 help. No signal. Still waiting 4 help.

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three green binders, a silver laptop, several colorful green folders, a pair of seafoam green earbuds, a dark green umbrella, and four photos.

I scooped them up with both hands, almost immediately studying the first one. I might be noisy, but I had a habit of looking at other photos.

The picture had four people: Katherine sitting in her wheelchair, (with LONG hair) a girl with shoulder length blonde curls and dark green eyes with her hand on the left side of Katherine's wheelchair.

A tall dark girl who had jet black had her hand on the right side of Katherine's wheelchair. The last girl was a cheerful looking Asian girl with her arms outstretched on the right side of Katherine. She had a mop of thick black hair that framed her face, and beautiful brown eyes that shone when she smiled.

"This picture was taken right before I cut my hair for cancer," Katherine recalled as she touched the picture gently.

"Who's that?" I asked, pointing to the girl with blonde curls and lively bright green eyes on the left side of Katherine.

"Christina Jones," Katherine explained. "She was one of the only friends I had. She was always energetic, and always seemed to have a smile for everyone, even me."

"And who's that beside of her?" I asked, pointing to the black girl on the right side of Christina.

"Ada Keita," Katherine said. "She traveled all over the world, but liked to play basketball. And the Asian girl is Meizhen Huáng. Meizhen was my best friend."

I flipped to another photo. This time, it was a picture of Katherine with her parents. Once again, she was seated in her wheelchair, with her parents positioned on both sides of her.

Her parents looked ordinary enough, but I noticed how Katherine resembled her mom more than her dad. They both had the same eye shape and light green eye color, the same gentle smile, and the same upturned nose.

The picture looked like it had been taken in late Spring; the flowers in the background were in full bloom, as if they wanted to be alive and beautiful for a few more months before they died.

The sky was a gorgeous bright blue, with fluffy white clouds drifting aimlessly through the sky. Her mom had long straight brown hair that was swept back, and her light green eyes were

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I flipped to the last photo. It was a picture of a baby, with a rosy complexion, a tiny button nose, large light green eyes, chubby fingers, and chubby cheeks. The baby was sucking on a bottle, with its feet in the air, as if she was trying to kick hard enough to fly. The baby appeared to be laying on a flowery blanket, and wore a frilly pink dress.

"That was me, when I was a few months old," Katherine said sheepishly as she ran her fingers through her hair.

"You were adorable," I said as I smiled at the picture of the baby, awwing at how cute the baby was.

I flipped to the final picture, this one of Katherine's mom cradling a baby Katherine, in mid laugh when the picture had been taken. Katherine's mom looked much younger and relaxed, less tired and aged from being a mom. Her hair was still long, but now there were no grey hairs, streaking through the brown.

"That was when I was two months old," Katherine explained as I handed her the pictures back. She opened the front pocket of her backpack and slipped them back in, zipping it shut again. Suddenly, the front door of the bus opened, and a tall burly man with a curly black beard stepped on.

"Are you Jacob Pandarish?" the man asked grumpily as he half waddled, half climbed onto the bus.

"Yes sir," Jacob nodded as he stood up to shake the man's hand, afterwards sliding the bus key into the key slot thingie.

"I'm Tim. Let's take a look at the broken down bus," he said as he stepped off the bus, and began examining it.

"Finally!" exclaimed the girl who had been starving only minutes ago. "We're being saved!"

"What you have there on the bus is a dead battery," Tim grunted as he finally stepped back on the bus.

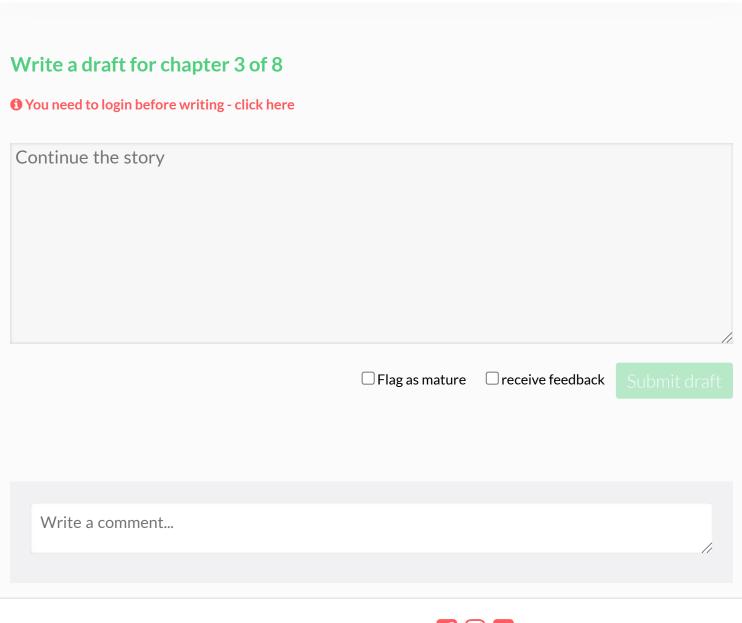
"I can call the bus company," Jacob said as he tried to turn on his phone. "They'll send a bus for the kids."

Almost immediately, Jacob got on the phone, talking with the bus company about the bus, yadda, yadda. In a few minutes, a new bus came, and we streamed out of the bus, hurrying to



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